



www.ncparks.gov

INSIDE...

| | |
|---------------------|------|
| FIRST DAY HIKES | P. 4 |
| NEW PETTIGREW LAND | P. 6 |
| 500,000TH LONGLEAF | P. 7 |
| 'YEAR OF THE BAT' | P.10 |
| RETIREES RECOGNIZED | P.11 |

Beverly Eaves Perdue
Governor

March 2012

Volume 26 Number 1

Dee Freeman
Secretary, DENR

2011 ATTENDANCE SETS RECORD AGAIN

(Complete attendance figures for 2011 on Page 15.)

Visitation at North Carolina's state parks and state recreation areas continued at a record level in 2011, with 14.25 million visits, matching the all-time record set in 2009, and posting a slight increase from 14.19 million visits in 2010.

Among 39 state parks and state recreation areas, 15 reported increases in attendance in 2011. Jockey's Ridge State Park in Dare County reported the highest attendance

at 1.32 million visits, down slightly from 1.47 million last year.

"State parks make a strong contribution to North Carolina's tourism economy as well as to the economies of local communities in which they're located. Their continued record attendance reflects the value that North Carolinians and visitors to this state place on outdoor recreation and our natural resources," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director.

"In addition, families

continue to benefit from the affordable recreation and education opportunities in these special places."

A 2008 economic study revealed that travelers spend an average \$23.56 a day to enjoy the state parks. The analysis by North Carolina State University's Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management estimated the state parks system's total annual economic impact at more than \$400 million.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



PARK OF THE YEAR

STAFF, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS GATHERED AT LAKE WACCAW STATE PARK TO CELEBRATE ITS BEING NAMED THE 2011 PARK OF THE YEAR BY THE N.C. DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION. COMPLETE STORY ON PAGE 2.

AWARDS RECOGNIZE HEROISM, HARD WORK

Awards and commendations for heroism and special achievements were announced for 14 state parks system employees in November at the annual Superintendent's Conference of the Division of Parks and Recreation.

The awards program honors employees and volunteers who've made outstanding contributions that serve the division's mission and the citizens of North Carolina. There are eight categories – heroism, distinguished service, Thomas C. Ellis, special achievement, Locke Craig, state parks, division commendation and park safety recognition.

Also, three friends of the state parks system were honored for contributions to individual parks with the Locke Craig Award.

A seven-person Awards Committee considers nominations under the direction of current

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Department of Environment and Natural Resources

LAKE WACCAMAW IS PARK OF THE YEAR

Lake Waccamaw State Park in Columbus County was named the North Carolina 2011 Park of the Year by the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation.

The park was chosen for its "exemplary contribution to the North Carolina state parks mission of stewardship, public service and education," through

initiatives in environmental education, community partnerships and special events planning.

"Each of our state parks strives to further our mission and be a valued member of its community, but Lake Waccamaw State Park went above and beyond with its hard work in 2011," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director.

"In these times when state budgets are stressed and state parks attendance remains at record levels, the effort by the staff at Lake Waccamaw is especially commendable."

The park has been heavily involved in community events, such as Big Sweep, a summer science enrichment camp, water quality monitoring, the Waccamaw River Paddle Trail initiative and the Take-the-Lake Personal Endurance Event.

During the year, it also increased its interpretive programming and increased the acreage of prescribed burns for natural resource management.

The award was announced at the division's superintendent's conference in November and officially acknowledged in December at a brief event of friends and staff at the park.

The state parks system began choosing a Park of the Year in 2010 with nominations from each of the four districts. Each of 35 state parks and four state recreation areas submits an annual report that is objectively scored on progress in recreation, natural resource protection, sustainability, public safety and environmental education.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

From The Director's Desk

Just about any manager in business or government will regularly give a nod to an organization's employees. But, there's hard evidence from several fronts in this issue of *The Steward* that the state parks system's employees are truly exceptional. With lean budgets and in stressful times, they've taken on more of the load than ever in recent years and performed remarkably.

It was my pleasure recently to personally present awards to 14 parks employees who went well above and beyond expectations, some earning heroism awards and division commendations that had life-saving implications for our citizens. Others used innovation and just simple hard work to make a difference – not just in a budget line item, but in terms of service and stewardship of natural resources. And, the bar for these awards is set rather high. A committee of seven peers on the Awards Committee scrutinizes each nomination with an eye toward real contributions and standards set by past honorees. My congratulations go also to Lake Waccamaw State Park, selected as the 2011 Park of the Year, largely on the basis of its strong environmental ethic and community involvement.

Another example is the commitment of parks that contributed to the First Day Hikes event on Jan. 1, promoted by America's State Parks and the National Association of State Park Directors. Some of North Carolina's state parks already had a tradition of First Day Hikes; in 2012, state parks systems in all 50 states participated in the effort to "Get Outdoors!" On somewhat short notice and working around holiday schedules, 28 parks stepped up with 30 interesting, guided hikes for the national effort. That effort was appreciated by 1,392 hikers who traveled a combined 4,573 miles on our trails that day. Many of them will remember the experience for a long time to come. Great job!

Our parks office assistants are often the most under-appreciated of our employees. They're true professionals who are essentially office managers with wide-ranging skills necessary to keep our parks operating every day. Our Administrative Professional Council took occasion to recognize six of these employees who have retired in the past year. Together, they represent more than 83 years of experience. Obviously, they'll be sorely missed not only by park staff, but by citizens and state government as a whole. Our best wishes go to these retirees.

Sincerely,



Lewis Ledford

PARK OF THE YEAR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Final judging is by senior and district administrators.

To honor the Park of the Year, a medallion is attached to a hiking staff that is passed to the current award recipient each year. South Mountains State Park in Burke County captured the first-ever award in 2010.

Lake Waccamaw State Park has a five-person staff, until recently under the direction of Superintendent Chris Helms. Last fall, Helms was named superintendent at Carolina Beach State Park to be succeeded by Toby Hall.



PARK STAFF AND FRIENDS EXAMINE THE AWARD'S DISPLAY HIKING STAFF.

ALPINE TRAINING

FIVE PARK SUPERINTENDENTS AND RANGERS ATTENDED ALPINE SEARCH AND RESCUE TRAINING AT GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN STATE PARK AND A NEARBY SKI SLOPE IN JANUARY, SPONSORED BY THE N.C. DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT. IT INVOLVED LEARNING THE USE OF SHOW-SHOES, CRAMPONS AND ICE AXES AS WELL AS BUILDING WINTER SHELTERS. THE TRAINERS WERE FROM THE DECHUTES COUNTY SHERIFF'S VOLUNTEER SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAM IN OREGON.





RANGER COLLEEN BOWERS LEADS A LARGE GROUP OF HIKERS ON AN EXPLORATION OF RAVEN ROCK STATE PARK.



FIRST DAY HIKES WELCOME NEW YEAR

Taking a break from football and other New Year's traditions, 1,392 hikers walked a combined 4,573 miles in the state parks on Jan. 1 in North Carolina's inaugural First Day Hikes event.

Eno River State Park and others have offered hiking events on New Year's Day in the past, and the public embraced the idea of creating a statewide tradition of getting outside for a bout of fresh air and exercise on the holiday.

Across the state, 28 state parks offered 30 hikes guided by rangers and volunteers.

The hikes were part of a nationwide effort to get people into the state parks on Jan. 1, with more than 400 hikes across 50 states promoted by America's State Parks and the National Association of State Park Directors. Nationally, more than 14,000 hikers covered more than 30,000 miles.

At Weymouth Woods State Nature Preserve, one of

two groups visited the site of the oldest known longleaf pine.

One visitor told his ranger guide, "What an absolutely awesome way to spend the first morning of the New Year! I'm standing in front of this 463-year-old longleaf pine and am dwarfed by its stature, beauty and endurance. Thanks you for the 1st First Day Hike!"

An email arrived at Lake Norman State Park a few hours after a hike offering, "Thanks for the hike today. Sarah is still telling her mom and brother how much fun she had while showing them all the pictures she took. We are looking forward to the next events."

Eno River State Park has offered the granddaddy of New Year's Day hikes for about 40 years, sponsored by the Eno River Association. A total 802 hikers packed that state park to take one of two hikes and enjoy hot chocolate afterwards.

Elsewhere, attendance was often strongest at parks near urban areas, with 60 hikers appearing at Raven Rock

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

FIRST DAY HIKES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

State Park, 52 at Carolina Beach, 45 at Fort Macon and 50 at William B. Umstead.

Cold and wet weather hampered attendance in the mountains, though rangers ventured out, often with only two or three visitors in tow. Only four showed up at New River State Park, but one was a holder of the acknowledged "triple crown" of hiking, a veteran of the Appalachian Trail, the Pacific Coast Trail and the Continental Divide Trail.

The longest hike was at Hanging Rock State Park, where 36 hardy souls trekked from the park's lowest elevation point on the Dan River to its highest on windswept Moore's Knob – and back again, a total of 11 miles.

Some of the state parks attempted to make the First Day Hike a bit special with unusual destinations.

Grandfather Mountain rangers led visitors to explore an old logging railbed and a backcountry quartzite ridge was the destination at Lake Nor-



RANGER ALLEN ROGERS AND HIKERS AT SOUTH MOUNTAINS STATE PARK.

man. Crowders Mountain State Park teamed with Kings Mountain State Park in South Carolina for a 10-mile, two-state trek on the trail that now connects the two parks.

Several parks friends groups co-sponsored the events.

Ruth Coleman, presi-

dent of the NASPD, said that the national response was enthusiastic.

"We are thrilled with the turnout for this inaugural event and hope that these hikes have inspired our visitors to continue hiking and recreating in our state parks throughout the year."



GORGES VOLUNTEERS

GORGES STATE PARK IN TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BEGAN HOSTING VOLUNTEER SATURDAYS THIS WINTER, WITH LOCAL RESIDENTS COMING OUT TO HELP SPRUCE UP TRAILS AND OTHER PUBLIC AREAS IN THE PARK.



MORE THAN 800 HIKERS APPEARED AT ENO RIVER STATE PARK.

PED STUDY EYES COST-CUTTING IDEAS

The state parks system should investigate the consolidation of some park operations and collect daily visitation data as steps toward pursuing other cost-cutting options, according to a Program Evaluation Division report being presented to the N.C. General Assembly.

However, in its report on dozens of the state's attractions, the fiscal watchdog agency did not recommend that historic sites, state parks and other natural resource attractions be lumped into a single agency.

Currently, historic sites and some museums are administered by the Department of Cultural Resources, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources oversees state parks, the zoo, aquariums and the Museum of Natural Sciences.

The evaluation agency was commissioned by the legislature to identify potential efficiencies for all the attractions.

The state parks system furnished the agency with detailed financial data and information about operations over the past few months, and agency representatives made a number of on-site visits.

Their report will be routed through a legislative oversight committee for specific recommendations to the full legislature.

Specifically, the report suggests that the state parks system consider consolidating its operations in Bladen County where Jones Lake and

Singletary Lake state parks are in close proximity and near Baytree Lake and White Lake (where there are administrative functions but no public facilities).

State parks, it says, should "examine additional sites where management could feasibly be consolidated and develop an implementation plan for management reductions."

The report also suggests that money could be saved if all state parks were closed for a couple days a week or perhaps from December through February. It estimates a savings of \$2.4 million for a winter season closing.

But, the authors concede that more visitation data – including daily reports – must be compiled to "determine optimal operating schedules."

The report likely will be reviewed further when the General Assembly reconvenes for its short session in May.

The report was more conclusive when referring to some historic sites. It recommended that the state close the Museum of the Albemarle in Elizabeth City and the Richard Caswell Memorial in Kinston and reduce operating hours at seven other locations citing high cost-per-visitor ratios.

The study also recommended that the N.C. Zoological Park in Asheboro and three state aquariums consider outsourcing more operations and expand partnerships with outside booster groups to reduce their reliance on state funds.

DONATION ADDS PETTIGREW ACREAGE

Pettigrew State Park benefitted in December from a donation by Fred and Alice Stanbeck of Salisbury through the N.C. Coastal Land Trust.

A 188-acre tract on the Scuppernong River was added to the park with the donation that was combined with grants from the Parks and Recreation and Natural Heritage trust funds.

The tract adjoins other property in the park's Scuppernong River Section just outside of Creswell. It includes almost a mile of river frontage, which will be added to a four-mile stretch of river frontage now protected by the state park.

The blackwater river is a national Significant Natural Heritage Area which hosts rare species, included the red-cockaded woodpecker, the American alligator and red wolf. The river is essentially undeveloped upstream from the town of Columbia.



SCUPPERNONG RIVER IN PETTIGREW STATE PARK

The park's river section now encompasses 2,734 acres and adjoins an additional 3,214 acres managed as part of the federal Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge.

In 2005, the park's river section was created when acreage was purchased from two lumber companies and a private estate and augmented with a 686-acre donation from The Nature Conservancy.

A CROWD BEGINS GATHERING FOR THE CEREMONY AS A TECHNICIAN FOR THE NATURE CONSERVANCY CONTINUES PLANTING THE LAST OF 500,000 LONGLEAF PINES IN THE BACKCOUNTRY OF CARVERS CREEK STATE PARK IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY.



SPECIAL LONGLEAF GETS SPECIAL HOME

Every longleaf pine in the 4,076-acre Carvers Creek State Park is special but one is a bit more special, being the 500,000th pine planted by the Sandhills Conservation Partnership (SCP).

The two-foot-tall longleaf was introduced to its new home near the park's boundary with Fort Bragg in a January ceremony staged by the partners, one of which is the state parks system.

Since it was formed in the year 2000, the SCP has rooted longleaf seedlings on about 1,500 acres in the Sandhills, including 350 acres of the state park that is still under development in northern Cumberland and southern Harnett counties.

The partnership's ultimate goal is to plant a million longleaf seedlings by 2015.



LARRY EARLEY, LEFT, AUTHOR OF "LOOKING FOR LONGLEAF," AND MIKE LYNCH, A TRAINING DIRECTOR AT FORT BRAGG, PLANT THE SYMBOLIC LONGLEAF.

Plantings are followed by a regimen of prescribed burns to restore the longleaf ecosystem and ultimately create an attractive habitat for the red-cockaded woodpecker.

The bird's endangered status and disappearing habitat in the late 1990s threatened to curtail training on the army base, prompting Fort Bragg to partner with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to create the SCP. Besides those agencies and the state parks, partners are the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, N.C. Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, Sandhills Area Land Trust and Sandhills Ecological Institute.

The ceremonial planting was performed by Mike Lynch, who directs training at Fort Bragg and Larry Earley, naturalist and author of "Looking for Longleaf: The Fall and Rise of an American Forest."

Earley said organizations in the Sandhills have made great strides in the last decade to restore the longleaf forest.

"It was all but written off 30 years ago. It's kind of like coming back from the dead," he told the Fayetteville Observer.

Longleaf pine once covered more than 90 million acres in the South, but less than three million acres remain today. The tree played an important role in the region's culture and economic development through its supply of material for naval stores.

DIVISION AWARDS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

chairman Adrian O'Neal, east district superintendent.

Heroism and Division Commendation – Ranger Jody Kelly, Ranger Robin Kalish, Ranger Rob Preston, Ranger Phil Howell, Jordan Lake SRA

On September 3, 2010 at about 10:30 p.m., Kelly examined a parked car on U.S. 64 near Jordan Lake State Recreation Area and discovered a suicide note. Minutes later, Kelly, Kalish, Howell and Preston located the apparent driver of the car, a young woman intent on jumping from a bridge over the Haw River. The rangers caught the woman's attention and held her at the bridge's railing.

The award nomination reads in part, "Due to these four rangers' diligence, attention to detail and quick actions, they prevented a tragedy from occurring on their shift and hopefully started the process of this individual getting the help she needed to live a long and fruitful life, not only for herself but for her family."

(Note: Phil Howell has since moved from the division to serve with the Ashe County Sheriff's Department.)

Division Commendation – Josh Hemric, Pilot Mountain State Park

Responding to a call for help at a rock climbing area in 2011, Hemric found a climber in medical distress. While arranging for a carryout rescue, the victim began to go into full cardiac arrest. Hemric immediately initiated CPR with the help of a climbing guide and continued for almost 10 minutes until medical personnel arrived with a defibrillator.

On a second shock of

the defibrillator, the victim regained a weak pulse and began breathing and was transported by helicopter to a medical center. After a week of treatment, he made a full recovery.

Division Commendation – Ranger Richard Keenan, Ranger David LaPlante, Fort Fisher SRA

Summoned to the pedestrian beach in April 2011, Keenan spotted a woman in the surf who signaled she was in distress. Keenan, LaPlante and a park visitor entered the water and pulled the woman to shore.

The woman was conscience, but not alert. She began asking about the whereabouts of her two teenage daughters and two friends who were on the beach. The rangers and other park staff located the teenagers and transported them to a hospital where the woman had been taken.

Special Achievement – Maintenance Mechanic William Davis, Cliffs of the Neuse State Park

In addition to his regular duties, Davis established a sign shop dedicated to the consistent, timely and cost-effective production of plastic signs made of recycled material. In its first two years of operation, the method saved the division an estimated \$219,000 compared to the cost of commercially-made signs.

Davis created special designs and production methods and frequently delivered signs personally on short notice in time for special events.

Special Achievement – Maintenance Mechanic Garry Hoover, Maintenance Mechanic Gary Pippen, Hanging Rock

State Park

Concerned over the cost of repairs by outside vendors to the park's 23 heating, ventilation and air conditioning units, Hoover and Pippen enrolled in HVAC courses at Forsyth Technical Community College on their own time and at their expense.

When the HVAC class lost its Stokes County location, Hoover and Pippen arranged for the park to host the class, with class members then providing service to all park units and necessary emergency repairs at no cost.

Special Achievement – Exhibit Technician Martin Kane, Administration

With a severely limited budget, Kane condensed an immense amount of interpretive information to upgrade the museum's exhibits at Morrow Mountain State Park. Kane developed schematics, produced design and construction drawings, designed graphics, and provided much of the photography, all tasks usually performed by contractors.

Kane also created the park's Wintertime Bird Identification Guide, an interactive computer exhibit.

Special Achievement – Superintendent Larry Trivette, Superintendent Jay Greenwood, Ranger Lance Huss

These employees serve voluntarily – as all division instructors do – as law enforcement Subject Control and Arrest Techniques (SCAT) instructors, providing training to rangers and superintendents. The important SCAT classes during Annual Law Enforce-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

DIVISION AWARDS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

ment Refresher Training (ALERT) helps prevent officer and suspect injuries, protects against civil liability and helps provide officers with the skill and confidence to effect arrests through a subject's resistance.

Due to resignations, injuries and medical leave, only Trivette, Greenwood and Huss were available instead of the usual corps of eight instructors. All three participated in each four-hour block of SCAT classes during the 10 weeks of ALERT training, resulting in more than 40 hours of instruction by each, on top of weekly travel time.

Special Achievement – Maintenance Mechanic David Rodgers, Pilot Mountain State Park

With two maintenance positions vacant during the year, Rodgers was the only remaining fulltime maintenance employee at the park and assumed responsibilities for trails maintenance and camping areas, facility and utilities maintenance and supervision of seasonal staff that were normally attached to the two vacant positions.

During this period, the park experienced eight waterline breaks that were repaired with minimal loss of service to the public.

Also during this period, Rodgers built the park's new canoe camping area using seasonal staff, the first significant improvement to the Yadkin River Section in 10 years.

Locke Craig Award – Harold Russell (Crowders Mountain State Park)

Harold Russell publicizes Crowders Mountain State Park through landscape



SEVEN STATE PARK RANGERS WERE PRESENTED WITH AWARDS FOR HEROISM AND/OR DIVISION COMMENDATION INVOLVING RECENT INCIDENTS AT PILOT MOUNTAIN STATE PARK AND FORT FISHER AND JORDAN LAKE STATE RECREATION AREAS. THEY ARE (TOP ROW, FROM LEFT) JOSH HEMRIC, PHIL HOWELL, ROBIN KALISH, (BOTTOM ROW, FROM LEFT) RICHARD KEENAN, JODY KELLY, DAVID LAPLANTE, ROB PRESTON. (NOTE: HOWELL HAS SINCE LEFT THE STATE PARKS SYSTEM.)

paintings of the park's features, often donating the paintings for display in the park's visitor centers.

Russell has also volunteered at the park's fall festival since 1998, providing supplies and prizes for a kid-friendly, leaf printmaking workshop. In 2009, he and an assistant helped visitors produce more than 90 prints in four hours.

Locke Craig Award – George Ball (Crowders Mountain State Park)

George Ball was a member and past president of the Gaston Conservation Society, a group instrumental in the 1970s creation of the park. Ball was also a founding member of the Friends of Crowders Mountain, Inc. in 2000 and has served as president and vice president.

In addition, with his local knowledge, Ball has assisted park staff in locating areas of

the park with significant cultural resources, and since 1999, has volunteered his time and special skills to produce high-quality hiking sticks for sale at the visitor center to benefit the friends group.

Locke Craig Award – Robbie Lowman (South Mountains State Park)

Robbie Lowman, a high school senior in Burke County who has regularly volunteered at the park, arranged a special gift for the state park as part of a school-mandated service project.

Lowman purchased Christmas trees from a relative and sold the trees from his home, donating \$700 in proceeds to Friends of South Mountains State Park for use in park projects and contributed an essay about financial difficulties facing the parks due to budget constraints.

KITS READY FOR 'YEAR OF THE BAT'

This is the "Year of the Bat" in North Carolina's state parks, in keeping with a new tradition of choosing a theme for educational programs in all the parks. It follows celebrations of birds and turtles in past years.

The nonprofit Friends of State Parks has "stepped up to bat" by generously donating funds to purchase educational bat kits.

The four kits – one for each district – include books, bat puppets, games, bat skeletons and bat detectors. The detectors turn ultrasonic bat calls into sounds that people can hear.

"Sharing these teaching tools will help our staff offer exciting new programs during our year-long bat celebration," said interpretation and education manager Sean Higgins.

"And, we'll be able to continue using these resources for many years, particularly around Halloween."



EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS WERE DONATED BY FRIENDS OF STATE PARKS.

Celebrating bats in 2012 is timely, as it coincides with Bat Conservation International's "Year of the Bat."

All 39 state parks and state recreation areas protect critical habitat for bats. In the mountains, cave-dwelling bats

are of particular conservation concern due to a disease epidemic known as white-nose syndrome.

Educational programs increase public awareness and appreciation of these often misunderstood mammals.



CAVE BAT SURVEY

A CAVE SURVEY AT GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN STATE PARK WAS CONDUCTED THIS WINTER BY STATE PARKS BIOLOGIST ED COREY, GABRIELLE GRAETER AND CORRINE DIGGINS OF THE WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMISSION AND JESSE POPE OF THE GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN STEWARDSHIP FOUNDATION. TWO HEALTHY VIRGINIA BIG-EARED BATS, A FEDERALLY ENDANGERED SPECIES, WERE LOCATED. THE RESEARCHERS DONNED PROTECTIVE CLOTHING WHICH WAS DECONTAMINATED FOLLOWING THE SURVEY, GIVEN THE THREAT OF WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME IN MOUNTAIN BAT POPULATIONS.



FROM LEFT, BONNIE AMBROSE, BETTY ANDERSON, MARTHA BLACKER, BARBARA HARPER, PAM LAURENCE AND JANICE MERCER HAVE ALL RETIRED RECENTLY FROM OFFICE ASSISTANT POSITIONS.

APC GROUP SALUTES RECENT RETIREES

The state parks system's Administrative Professional Council would like to recognize a number of truly dedicated administrative professionals who have retired in the last year.

Many of these retirees were with the division more than a decade, and all exemplify the type of hardworking, multi-faced professionals who strive to make the parks run efficiently year in, year out.

Barbara Harper retired from Kerr Lake State Recreation Area after 13 years of dedicated service. Harper worked at one of the largest and most visited recreation areas in the state.

Martha Blacker retired from Lake Norman State Park after 17 years of dedicated service. Blacker was the recipient of a distinguished service award and supported west district interpretive staff with map design, exhibits and photography.

Janice Mercer retired from Lake Waccamaw State Park after 13 years, eight months of dedicated service. Mercer managed pier and buoy rental and interpreted complex state lakes regulations for the park staff and public. She frequently represented the park at local community activities, and was an EMT and assistant chief of the Lake Waccamaw Fire Department.

Pam Laurence retired from New River State Park after 18 years of dedicated service. Laurence was appointed by the director as a charter member of the Administrative Professional Council. She helped train others in her park and the division in proper policies and procedures.

Bonnie Ambrose retired from Pettigrew State Park after 16 years of dedicated service. Ambrose was instrumental in developing and testing the state lakes database now in use for managing annual pier and buoy permits.

Betty Anderson retired from William B. Umstead State Park after six years of dedicated service. Anderson contributed a gallery's worth of nature photos captured and uploaded to the division's image database and was instrumental in developing and testing the central reservation system. In addition, she earned environmental education certification on her own time.

These committed professionals leave their parks and the division better for their many years of service. When initially hired, they could not have foreseen all the changes that would come with the budget database, central reservations system, increasing technology, etc., but each excelled for the sake of their parks.

Thank you, retirees, for your valuable contributions.



BAT BOXES

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH WAKE COUNTY'S YOUNG NATURALIST CLUB BUILT BAT HOUSES AT WILLIAM B. UMSTEAD STATE PARK. THE HOUSES WILL BE VISUAL AIDS FOR PARK PROGRAMS DURING THE 2012 'YEAR OF THE BAT' AND WILL LATER BE PLACED ON BUILDINGS AS ROOSTING SITES.

WILDER WILL LEAD MOUNT MITCHELL

Bryan Wilder, a veteran state park ranger, has been promoted to superintendent of Mount Mitchell State Park in Yancey County. He succeeds Jack Bradley, who retired as superintendent earlier this year.

A superintendent is the chief of operations and administration at a state park or state recreation area with wide-ranging responsibilities for staffing, training, law enforcement, visitor services, natural resource protection and environmental education.



A native of Kentucky, Wilder is a 1996 graduate of Morehead State University with a bachelor's degree in environmental science and geography.

MARTIN PROMOTED TO MAYO RIVER

Keith Martin, a veteran park ranger, has been promoted to superintendent of Mayo River State Park in Rockingham County. Martin succeeds Fred Watkins who accepted another assignment in 2011.

A superintendent is the chief of operations and administration at a state park or state recreation area with wide-ranging responsibilities for staffing, training, law enforcement, visitor services, natural resource protection and environmental education.



Martin has been a ranger at Pilot Mountain State Park since 1993. A native of Winston-Salem, he earned a bachelor's degree in parks and

Wilder worked with the soil conservation district in Clintwood, Va., with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and as a math and science teacher in Dickenson County, Va. before joining North Carolina's state parks system in 2005 as a ranger at Mount Mitchell.

He holds certifications in environmental education and intermediate law enforcement and is an American Red Cross instructor.

"Bryan is well-versed in the unique challenges presented at Mount Mitchell, the oldest state park in our system and one of the oldest in the nation. His range of experience will help ensure the park's leadership in conservation and tourism development," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director.

Mount Mitchell State Park opened in 1916, and now encompasses 1,996 acres. It reported visitation of 345,450 in 2010.

recreation management from Western Carolina University in 1990.

He previously worked as a law enforcement ranger for the National Park Service on the Blue Ridge Parkway and as an epidemiologist with the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources before joining the state parks system. He holds certifications in environmental education and as a law enforcement instructor.

"Keith brings with him excellent experience in all phases of state park management as well as a love and deep knowledge of central North Carolina's resources and history," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director. "His talents will be invaluable as we continue to develop and expand one of our newest state parks at Mayo River."

Mayo River State Park was created in 2003 and currently encompasses 1,961 acres.

LEDFORD GIVEN GOVERNOR'S AWARD

Lewis Ledford, director of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, received a Governor's Award for Excellence in November at a ceremony in Raleigh. It's the highest honor state employees can receive in North Carolina for dedicated service to the state.

The Governor's Award was created in 1982 by Gov. Jim Hunt and honors state employees for outstanding achievements in one of five areas – human relations, innovation, outstanding state

government service, public service and safety and heroism. Among 12 recipients, Ledford was honored for outstanding state government service.

Current Governor Bev Perdue presided at the ceremony and commented, "Lewis, I'm so pleased to present you with this award."

Dee Freeman, secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, said, "These awards not only honor those individ-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

PEARSON POSTED TO STONE MOUNTAIN

Janet Pearson, a veteran state park superintendent and ranger, has been named superintendent of Stone Mountain State Park in Wilkes and Alleghany counties. She succeeds Edward Farr, who retired in 2011.

A superintendent is the chief of operations and administration at a state park or state recreation area with wide-ranging responsibilities for staffing, training, law enforcement, visitor services, natural resource protection and environmental education.

Pearson is a native of the Pilot Mountain area and a 2000 graduate of Western Carolina University with a bachelor's degree in parks and recreation management. She worked in seasonal positions for the state parks system and as an



interpreter for the Horne Creek Living Historical Farm before becoming a fulltime ranger at Pilot Mountain State Park in 2000.

In January 2010, she became the first superintendent of the developing Carvers Creek State Park in Cumberland County. She holds certifications in environmental education and intermediate law enforcement.

"With her background in northwestern North Carolina and administrative experience in guiding the development of Carvers Creek State Park, Janet brings strong skills to this position," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director.

"Stone Mountain will continue to be one of the most popular state parks in the region, with ever-growing demands to balance outdoor recreation with wise natural resource protection."

Established in 1969, Stone Mountain State Park encompasses 14,210 acres and reported 440,612 visitors in 2011.

LEDFORD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

was for their outstanding efforts, but are further evidence of the devotion the entire staff in the department have to serve the citizens of North Carolina."

Joining the state parks system as an entry-level ranger in 1976, Ledford began a career that would lead him to become the division director in 2003 and would help preserve some of North Carolina's most treasured natural resources, including Chimney Rock and Grandfather Mountain.

During his tenure, the state parks system's managed lands increased by more than 20 percent, with seven new state parks, and annual attendance has reached a record of more than 14 million.

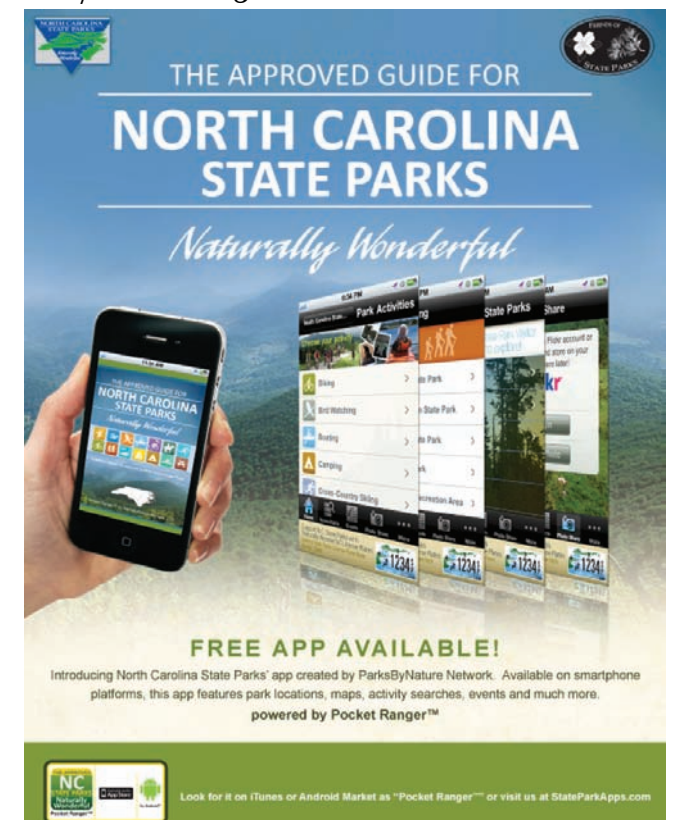
The award nomination reads in part, "Throughout his career, Ledford has been instrumental in developing partnerships with conservation organizations, landowners and government agencies that have helped to make North Carolina state parks one of the nation's premier state parks systems..."

"Under Ledford's leadership, a number of innovative projects have also enhanced the state parks system. He initiated the first study of the economic impact of state parks in North Carolina, worked to develop a full service Internet and call center-based reservations system, and helped to develop a smartphone application for park visi-

tors, all at no cost to the state."

About one third of the proceeds of the mobile app are returned to the state parks system.

A video about Ledford's nomination has been posted to YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3mdJoYZlbw>



ATTENDANCE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Several state parks that reported higher attendance in 2011 were able to offer new amenities to visitors.

A new 700-foot swim beach and picnic area at Lake James State Park opened for its first full season, and the park experienced a 70 percent jump in visitation.

A renovated marina at Carolina Beach State Park, a new equestrian trail network at Medoc Mountain State Park and a number of hiking trail projects, including a volunteer-built summit trail at Elk Knob State Park, also contributed to increased visitation.

The state parks system manages more than 215,000 acres within state parks, state recreation areas and a system of state natural areas dedicated to conservation of rare resources.

LADDERS REPLACED AT GRANDFATHER

Staff members at Grandfather Mountain State Park were involved in a project in the fall to upgrade one of the most spectacular portions of trail in the system.

A series of five ladders that carries hikers along MacRae Cliff on the Grandfather Trail was replaced. The trail follows the spine of the mountain in the state park and is under a trail easement allowing maintenance by the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation.

Foundation staff, park staff and volunteers from Appalachian State University and the Boone Climbers Coalition collaborated on the project.

Since the ladders are perched on nearly inaccessible sites, an element of the project was

Through its New Parks for a New Century initiative, six new state parks have been added to the system since 2003.

Parks with significant increases in visitation include Dismal Swamp State Park in Camden County (34 percent), Elk Knob State Park in Watauga County (50 percent), Jones Lake State Park in Bladen County (26 percent), Kerr Lake State Recreation Area in Vance County (24 percent) and Medoc Mountain State Park in Halifax County (31 percent).

State park visitation is often affected by weather events. Hurricane Irene in August closed Goose Creek State Park for several weeks and other eastern and piedmont parks briefly, however drought conditions of recent years eased somewhat during 2011.

careful planning.

Wooden ladder posts and rungs were pre-cut, carried to the mountain's backcountry and assembled with carriage bolts. The construction site was about three-quarters of a mile from the Grandfather Mountain nature park managed by the foundation.

Gabriel Taylor, an interpretive specialist with the foundation, estimated about 200 man-hours of labor went into the assembly over three days.

"The old ladders weren't dangerous but it was time for them to be replaced," Taylor told the Mountain Times. "Hikers will notice subtle differences on the new ladders, one being that they are sturdier."

NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS

MONTHLY ATTENDANCE REPORT

DECEMBER, 2011

| NC STATE PARK | December 2011 | TOTAL YTD Dec-11 | December 2010 | TOTAL YTD Dec-10 | % CHANG (2011/2010 Dec YTD |
|--|---------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| Carolina Beach State Park | 46,232 | 549,342 | 24,316 | 498,630 | 90% 10% |
| Carvers Creek State Park | 0 | 10 | 0 | 225 | -100% -96 |
| Chimney Rock State Park | 4,900 | 167,532 | 1,973 | 214,728 | 148% -22 |
| Cliffs of the Neuse State Park | 7,273 | 166,674 | 5,129 | 193,704 | 42% -14 |
| Crowders Mountain State Park | 16,802 | 359,970 | 11,199 | 392,606 | 50% -8% |
| Dismal Swamp State Park | 4,437 | 78,067 | 2,360 | 58,293 | 88% 34% |
| Elk Knob State Park | 1,053 | 34,022 | 121 | 22,618 | 770% 50% |
| Eno River State Park including | | | | | |
| Oconeechee Mountain State Natural Area | 27,559 | 486,974 | 17,924 | 463,248 | 54% 5% |
| Falls Lake State Recreation Area | 18,149 | 863,023 | 10,266 | 799,039 | 77% 8% |
| Fort Fisher State Recreation Area | 19,662 | 809,698 | 14,006 | 843,230 | 40% -4% |
| Fort Macon State Park | 41,044 | 1,295,170 | 36,320 | 1,344,126 | 13% -4% |
| Goose Creek State Park | 13,424 | 251,503 | 6,192 | 273,666 | 117% -8% |
| Gorges State Park | 5,319 | 92,060 | 3,066 | 77,652 | 73% 19% |
| Grandfather Mountain State Park | 2,430 | 49,820 | 112 | 14,756 | 2,070% 23% |
| Hammocks Beach State Park | 3,057 | 81,181 | 872 | 91,062 | 251% -11% |
| Haw River State Park | 1,107 | 23,696 | 451 | 24,423 | 145% -3% |
| Hanging Rock State Park | 19,701 | 516,507 | 11,961 | 537,406 | 65% -4% |
| Jones Lake State Park | 3,954 | 55,067 | 662 | 43,767 | 497% 26% |
| Jordan Lake State Recreation Area | 20,350 | 872,967 | 24,237 | 1,107,628 | -16% -21% |
| Jockey's Ridge State Park | 31,430 | 1,323,364 | 24,956 | 1,478,034 | 26% -10% |
| Kerr Lake State Recreation Area | 31,504 | 1,240,776 | 20,572 | 997,616 | 53% 24% |
| Lake James State Park | 25,081 | 569,319 | 21,629 | 335,537 | 16% 70% |
| Lake Norman State Park | 27,585 | 504,429 | 20,394 | 526,446 | 35% -4% |
| Lake Waccamaw State Park | 4,172 | 86,068 | 2,708 | 89,534 | 54% -4% |
| Lumber River State Park | 4,172 | 63,740 | 2,924 | 90,518 | 43% -30% |
| Mayo River State Park | 3,403 | 36,227 | 1,478 | 36,772 | 130% -1% |
| Merchants Millpond State Park | 15,125 | 263,567 | 5,138 | 232,271 | 194% 13% |
| Medoc Mountain State Park | 4,480 | 82,236 | 3,402 | 62,782 | 32% 31% |
| Mount Mitchell State Park | 2,106 | 302,797 | 698 | 345,450 | 202% -12% |
| Morrow Mountain State Park | 14,200 | 449,439 | 11,610 | 370,782 | 22% 21% |
| New River State Park including | | | | | |
| Mount Jefferson State Natural Area | 9,864 | 319,308 | 6,706 | 355,220 | 47% -10% |
| Pettigrew State Park | 4,042 | 67,610 | 2,516 | 72,238 | 61% -6% |
| Pilot Mountain State Park | 31,660 | 441,904 | 10,108 | 439,752 | 213% 0% |
| Raven Rock State Park | 9,919 | 152,665 | 3,554 | 156,433 | 179% -2% |
| Singletary Lake State Park | 279 | 22,696 | 567 | 26,552 | -51% -15% |
| South Mountains State Park | 10,026 | 196,272 | 5,742 | 218,848 | 75% -10% |
| Stone Mountain State Park | 11,412 | 440,612 | 6,864 | 424,512 | 66% 4% |
| Weymouth Woods-Sandhills Nature Preserve | 4,352 | 58,367 | 3,824 | 52,306 | 14% 12% |
| William B. Umstead State Park | 41,536 | 881,180 | 52,586 | 876,993 | -21% 0% |
| SYSTEMWIDE TOTAL | 542,801 | 14,255,859 | 379,143 | 14,189,403 | 43% 0% |

'PARK' IT

WITH A STATE PARKS SPECIALTY LICENSE TAG

The Division of Motor Vehicles is accepting applications and payment for these special license plates. There is a \$30 fee in addition to regular license fees (\$60 for personalized plates). Additional fees support conservation through the Parks and Recreation and Natural Heritage trust funds.

Information at www.ncparks.gov
or www.ncdot.org/dmv





Our Mission Remains...

to protect North Carolina's **natural diversity**;
to provide and promote **outdoor recreation**
opportunities throughout North Carolina;
to exemplify and encourage **good stewardship**
of North Carolina's natural resources for all
citizens and visitors.

*8,000 copies of this public document were printed
at a cost of \$562.00 or \$0.07 per copy.*

SAFETY ZONE

PREPARE RESPONSE FOR EMERGENCIES

- ✓ Become familiar with all of your workplace procedures and policies for emergencies.
- ✓ Know the fire and evacuation plan for the area where you work.
- ✓ Be aware of the location of fire extinguishers, fire alarms, flashlights, defibrillators and emergency supplies.
- ✓ Take the time to learn CPR, the Heimlich maneuver and other first aid techniques.

The Steward
NC Division of Parks and Recreation
Public Information Office
1615 MSC
Raleigh, NC 27699-1615

